

PreK-12 Newsletter

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an evidence-based model that is one of the two focus areas of Florida's current State Professional Development Grant (SPDG)—a model that is evidencing outstanding results for students. Student agency, or students taking responsibility and involvement in their own learning, is critical to student success. The article on Peers as Partners in Learning (PPL) focuses on a highly effective way to harness the power of student-to-student learning to improve outcomes, particularly for students with disabilities.

The implementation of schooling practices that are effective for ALL students is a collective goal of all educators. This edition of the Newsletter increases our knowledge of and exposure to such practices and highlights how our districts and schools in Florida are implementing those practices. So, Relax, Keep Calm and Enjoy Reading the Newsletter!

Introduction

By George Batsche, Project Director

Welcome to the current edition of the PK-12 Newsletter. The theme of this newsletter focuses on multiple approaches to ensuring that instruction is more personalized and facilitates greater levels of student engagement. These approaches range from the emerging focus on personalized learning (and multiple ways to do this) to the use of technology and positive behavior supports—all focused on maximizing the impact of the teaching/learning process. As Jayna Jenkins notes in her article, the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), through a significant grant from the Gates Foundation, has been holding state-level meetings across the United States that focus on the use of personalized learning for students with disabilities. New Hampshire, Colorado and North Carolina have participated in identifying how they use personalized learning with students with disabilities and attention disorders. The effort has identified multiple strategies, including those in this newsletter, to personalize learning for students. Creating engaging climates to promote student learning and engagement is essential and is the focus of Devon Minch's article on coaching PBIS. Leveraging the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) brings attention to



Invitation to Participate!

Pilot of Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism- Parent Survey

The Florida Problem Solving-Response to Intervention Project has developed a tool designed to measure the parent-reported reasons for chronic absenteeism among PreK-12 students. The instrument has undergone an extensive development process, and we are currently initiating a national validation study. We are recruiting state or local education agencies that will commit schools to participate by identifying the parents of PreK-12 students who have missed 10% or more of school days during the 2016/2017 school year and have them complete the instrument and submit the results to the Project.

<http://floridarti.usf.edu/rca/parent/invitation.html>

Keep Calm and PERSONALIZE LEARNING for Your Students!

~Jayna Jenkins, Coordinator, Student Support Services Project

As educators, we share a common commitment to improve educational outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students at risk of not graduating on time with their peers. Most of us would agree that we want to see students and adults reach success in school, in work, and in life. To accomplish this, our students need equal access to educational opportunities. Across the nation, there is a growing movement and approach to providing equitable access and opportunity for all students – personalized learning.

As a classroom teacher, I admit that the first thought that came to my mind when I heard the words “personalized learning” was *individualized instruction*. Immediately, my next thought was that this seemed unlikely and even impossible for one teacher in a classroom of over 20 students to implement and successfully sustain over a long period of time. However, when I took a closer look, I changed my mind.

While there is no single definition for personalized learning, the National Center for Learning Disabilities provides the following definition: “Students’ learning experiences—what they learn, and how, when, and where they learn it—are tailored to their individual needs, skills, and interests, and enable them to take ownership of their learning. Although where, when, and how they learn might vary according to their needs, students also develop deep connections to each other, their teachers and other adults.” (see <http://www.nclld.org/archives/reports-and-studies/personalizedlearning>).

According to the Alliance for Excellence, “**Personalized learning** is a student-centered approach designed to help all students develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to **prepare them for college, career, and life.**” (see <http://all4ed.org/issues/personalized-learning/>).

As I learned more, I realized that I had already implemented the components of personalized learning in my classroom without knowing it was called *personalized learning*. For example, under a personalized learning approach, teachers assist students with becoming prepared for life, college, and career by adopting the following practices:

- **Developing caring and trusted relationships with students.** Students who develop these relationships put more effort into their schoolwork.
In the classroom, simple things add up: greet students at the door, treat students with respect, call parents with good news [not just complaints], attend ball games or community events that students are engaged in, ask about students’ interests, get to know your students, etc.
- **Linking the curriculum to students’ interests, strengths, and goals.**
Survey and interview students, survey or conference with parents, find texts and activities to match interests, engage in teacher/student data chats, goal setting, and student self-graphing of their progress.
- **Providing each student with targeted support in areas with which they struggle.**
Florida’s multi-tiered system of supports framework helps us accomplish this.
- **Creating flexible learning environments that incorporate multiple instructional approaches along with effective use of technology.**
For example, rather than relying on printed text alone, I recorded myself—or arranged for older students, teachers, or administrators to record themselves—reading texts, assignments, instructions, etc., for the independent and center activities.

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Keep Calm and PERSONALIZE LEARNING for Your Students!

(Continued from Page 2)

- **Connecting learning to real-world applications, especially outside the classroom, through internships, community partnerships, etc.**
See http://www.ncl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PL-RoadmapForEducators.Fin_.pdf
For young students, incorporate virtual and real field trips, guest speakers, etc.

The benefits of a personalized learning approach are impressive and include increasing student engagement, encouraging growth mindset in students, as well as building decision-making and self-advocacy skills (see http://www.ncl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PL-RoadmapForEducators.Fin_.pdf).

The personalized learning approach came naturally to me as I thought about systemic design, aka “working smarter, not harder”. Going beyond just “teaching the standards” to designing the classroom environment so that students actively engage in learning made sense to me. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) outline this approach, including focusing on design and engineering the learning environment so that students have multiple ways to engage in learning, access content, and express their learning (see <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines>).

While UDL takes a lot of work on the front end, it pays off greatly when students are going home exhausted from working and learning, not from listening to me deliver instruction all day. This approach encourages students to grow into *expert learners*. “Expert learners” are students who are resourceful and knowledgeable, strategic and goal-directed, and purposeful and motivated (see <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/expertlearners>).

To be honest, I fell into this approach by what initially viewed as a failure or lack of skill on my part. The first time I moved from an ESE classroom to a second grade general education classroom was midyear (January) and the math block was after lunch, recess, and special activity (in that order,

every day). I just could not hold their attention in whole group math instruction at 1:30 in the afternoon.

To ensure that learning occurred with this challenging schedule, I shifted from whole group instruction to small group instruction, and incorporated independent small group and individual activities using technology, manipulatives, journaling, and peer learning. With the help of experienced peer teachers, I was able to understand how to offer multiple ways students could explain and show their learning in the independent and peer groups they were engaged in while I was working with smaller groups of students. Because they were not just “sitting and getting” whole group math instruction, I saw their capacity to be self-directed learners increase over time.

If you are interested in using this approach, you may consider the following tips:

Start small. Choose one class period or subject area to begin. **Planning** is where the bulk of the work happens, and frequent collaboration with teachers and experts in the school is critical. A team approach is especially helpful when thinking about designing multiple ways for students to access content and express their learning.

Observe others. Teachers rarely have the opportunity to observe other teachers at their school or district modeling their excellent instructional techniques. As a school or district leader, find which teachers are already utilizing personalized learning approaches and allow others to observe, learn, and ask questions. Preserve and protect time for teachers to regularly engage in data-driven planning.

Involve other stakeholders. Engage and connect with parents and other available resources. Parents can help provide valuable information about their child’s interests, strengths, and goals. Involving district- and state-level resources (such as the PS/RtI Project) to provide coaching and technical assistance for implementing UDL in classrooms broadens the opportunities available to students. Instructional coaches are a valuable resource for modeling, coaching, problem solving, and providing instructional resources.

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Keep Calm and PERSONALIZE LEARNING for Your Students!

(Continued from Page 3)

Finally, don't forget about your student services personnel! Your student services team can provide expertise in social/emotional learning, behavioral supports, and physical and mental health supports to help engage and promote healthy learners in your schools.

For more information on this topic, contact:

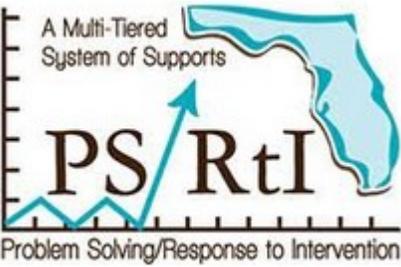
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For more information on UDL, see the Technology and Learning Connections website at:

<http://www.tlc-mtss.com/>



SAVE THE DATE **SAVE THE DATE**

The Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention (PS/RtI) Project is pleased to announce an upcoming webinar entitled “Building Staff Consensus for MTSS Implementation at the Secondary Level”, for an **intended targeted audience of school-level administrators**.

This webinar is part of an ongoing series focused on building capacity to educate secondary students with instruction matched to need resulting in college and career ready, on-time graduates.

This learning opportunity will be facilitated live via Adobe Connect, on **May 9th** from 3:30-5:00 EST. This webinar will include:

1. Strategies to build consensus among staff members for meeting the needs of all students
2. An exemplar panel of middle/high school principals discussing the practices they utilize to engage staff in meeting the needs of students and improve their school-wide data

To attend, please complete the online registration at:

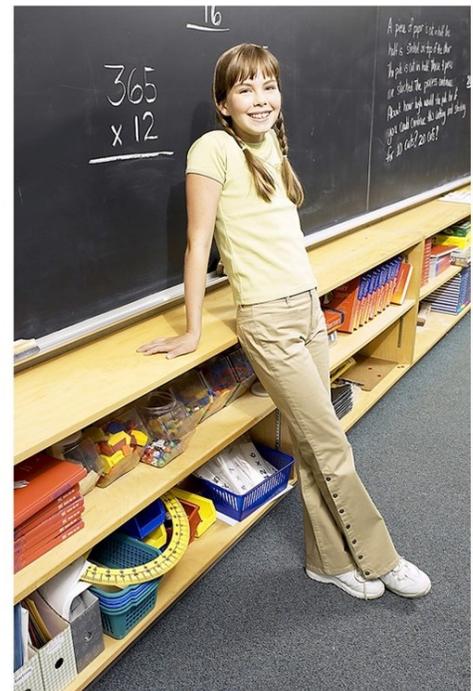
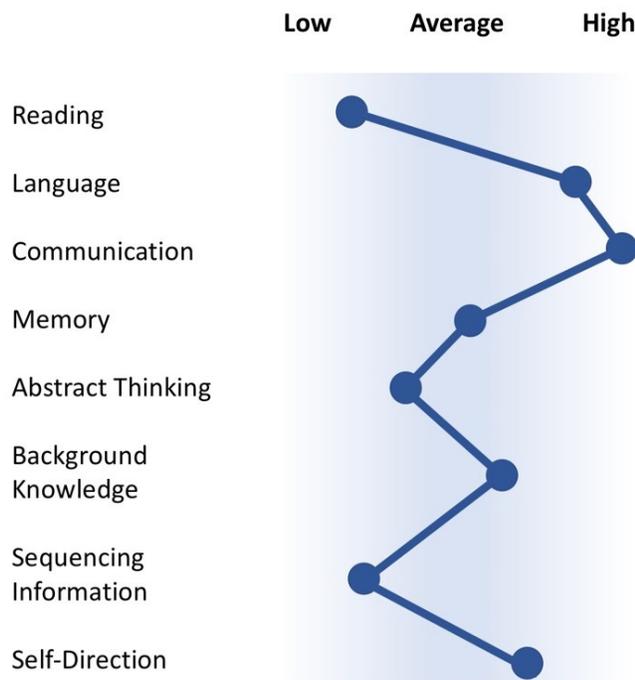
http://floridarti.usf.edu/surveys/consensus_webinar.html

Designing Flexible and Engaging Instruction for All Students

~David Davis, PS/Rtl Project, Coordinator-Technology & Learning Connections

The Vision of Florida's K-20 Educational System is to "have an efficient world-class education system that engages and prepares all students to be globally competitive for college and careers." (<http://www.fldoe.org/policy/state-board-of-edu/strategic-plan.shtml>)

Note the part that says, "engages and prepares **all** students." This is a big shift from the way education was designed in the past. For many years teacher preparation courses told future educators to teach to the middle, or teach to the average student. But there is a problem with teaching to the average student; such a student doesn't exist. All students differ in their learning skills and abilities.



Consider skills such as reading, language, communication, memory, abstract thinking, background knowledge, sequencing information, and self-direction. You will rarely find a student who is average in all these areas. There are many variations in student strengths and abilities, so it can be difficult to engage and prepare **all** students if our curriculum and instruction are designed for an "average" that doesn't really exist. Instead we need flexible curriculum materials and instructional strategies designed to support all students so that teachers can provide differentiated instruction to highly diverse student populations.

The presence of flexible curriculum materials and instructional scaffolds and supports for all students is critical to the design of effective Tier 1 instruction within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). The Florida Standards demonstrate what students are expected to learn for each grade level, but there are also implied skills students need to successfully engage in standards-based instruction. For example, a standard may address the ability to "recognize the major common characteristics of all planets and compare/contrast the properties of inner and outer planets." (SC.5.E.5.2) Skills that are not addressed but are important for successful engagement may include reading, writing, organization and synthesis of information, memory, and critical

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Designing Flexible and Engaging Instruction for All Students

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thinking. These are skill areas in which students will vary greatly; skill areas that, if weak, can become barriers to engagement and academic progress. It would be a mistake to increase the intensity of instruction on planetary characteristics when the lack of response to the instruction/intervention is a result of problems with reading fluency or information organization skills.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that can be used to guide the design of flexible curriculum, learning goals, instructional materials, and assessments that fit the needs of all students. UDL provides a set of principles that address student variability based on three cognitive networks: 1. Recognition Networks (the “what” of learning), 2. Strategic Networks (the “how” of learning), and 3. Affective Networks (the “why” of learning). Providing options or choices in these three areas gives students pathways to engagement based on their individual strengths and needs.

1. **Recognition Networks (providing options for representation)** – The Recognition Networks deal with how we recognize information and categorize what we see, hear, and read. Differences in visual and auditory perception abilities and language skills can have a significant impact on a student’s ability to understand curriculum content. When assigning curriculum content, give students choices in how they work with the information (e.g., printed books, audio books, leveled text, digital text with text-to-speech, videos). When using digital materials, useful options include the ability to change the font size of reading material, change the format (e.g. text to speech, text to braille), adjust contrast and colors, and adjust the reading level. In addition, tools such as online glossaries and dictionaries should be available to support vocabulary development. Translation tools should be available to support multiple languages. And advance graphic organizers would help students highlight big ideas, concepts, and relationships.
2. **Strategic Networks (providing options for action and expression)** – The Strategic Networks deal with how we organize and express our ideas (i.e., plan and perform tasks, set goals and monitor progress). Consider giving students choices in how they demonstrate what they have learned (e.g., producing a report in an essay format, creating a PowerPoint presentation, an audio or music product, an animation or movie). Give students different ways to work with and process the curriculum content. Provide tools to help students set goals and monitor progress. Mobile technologies and to-do apps can be very useful in monitoring the completion of assignments.
3. **Affective Networks (providing options for engagement)** – The Affective Networks deal with how we are challenged, excited, or interested. This includes self-regulation, personal coping skills, and self-assessment. When appropriate, allow students to choose topics and viewpoints to research. It’s important that assignments have a level of relevance to each student. Provide manipulatives and virtual manipulatives as options for exploring math concepts. Include hands-on activities, robotics, digital simulations, and immersive virtual worlds to support STEM instruction. Collaborative activities can be used to help students connect with and work with others, fostering collaboration and a sense of community. Give students time for self-assessment and reflection activities. Use formative assessment data, descriptions of mastery, and proficiency rubrics to guide students through a self-assessment of their own strengths and needs.

When options for recognition, action and expression, and engagement are available daily, students start to understand themselves and develop their own problem-solving skills around their academic and behavioral strengths and needs. The development of these personal problem-solving skills is critical to achieving the vision of preparing all students to be globally competitive for college and careers.

For further information on this topic, contact:

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Flexible Grouping

~Pam Sudduth, PS/RtI Project, Learning and Development Facilitator of Literacy

~Shelby Robertson, PS/RtI Project, Learning and Development Facilitator of Mathematics and Science

The Benefits of Flexible Grouping

Flexible grouping is a fluid, dynamic method of grouping students that provides a variety of ways to maximize student success by delivering a wide range of instructional delivery methods through whole class, small groups, and partnerships. It is a temporary way for students to collaborate in a variety of configurations, depending upon student and task needs, activity and intended outcome. It promotes learning by grouping and regrouping students throughout the school day. Educators have found that flexible grouping creates more productivity and assists with making the teacher's job a little easier by being able to provide differentiated support as learning needs dictate and the ability to zero in on the specific needs of individual students. When done effectively, flexible grouping meets academic and social/emotional needs and also allows students the opportunity to work with and learn from their peers to gain insight and alternate perspectives.

Designing Flexible Groups

Flexible groups motivate students to contribute to the learning of others to share ideas, make predictions or estimations about a problem, or formulate questions. To effectively group students, it requires purposeful planning based on data describing student needs and abilities. When grouping students, it is essential not to place students in the same group for every activity. The key to successful grouping is to adapt according to each individual's needs. This can be accomplished by identifying the most effective grouping design or configuration throughout the activity for the learning outcome to occur and differentiate the activities for each group to be successful. (Continued on Page 8)

Strategy	Problem-Solving Partnerships	Cooperative Teams	Collaborative Groups
Group Size	Two to three students per group.	Three to four students per group.	Three to six students per group.
Duration	Short (part of a class period to a few days).	Ranges from several days to several weeks.	Short (days) or longer (weeks or even months).
Task or Problem	Limited in scope (a single problem or question or a limited set) and is usually a challenge or practice activity for students to apply recent learning.	Clearly defined by the teacher.	Open-ended and may cover large amounts of course content.
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple approaches to solving the problem are encouraged. There is no single "right" way to solve most problems, and all reasonable solutions or answers to the problem are honored. Individual students have an opportunity to explain and discuss their suggested solutions as well as their misconceptions. New understandings are developed by the individual, by the team, and, finally, by the whole class. Group and class discussions (and solutions) provide immediate feedback to the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A team plan of operation and goals is specified, and teams are highly structured. Each student has a clearly defined role in the team such as recorder, questioner, and reporter. The teacher takes time to teach each student role. Team members share leadership within the framework of specific roles. All team members must contribute or the team cannot progress. (Teams "win or lose together.") The end product represents the entire team. The team focus is on cooperation as well as on achievement of goals. Awareness of the group process is as important as completing the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student roles are flexible and may change throughout the project or assignment. Students observe (and help with) other students' work, and critique, evaluate, explain, and suggest ways for improvement. Open communication and multiple approaches are emphasized. All students are involved in honest discussion about ideas, procedures, experimental results, gathered information, interpretations, resource materials, and their own or other students' work. Students are constantly aware of the collaborative communication process, as well as the product or goals. They know they can change direction to meet goals.

Flexible Grouping

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Managing Flexible Groups

Managing flexible groups takes planning and thoughtful consideration through modeling and practicing routines and procedures for getting into and out of groups, as well as, in-group behavior. Consistency is ensured by providing specific detailed directions and posting written instructions and expectations that are referred to frequently. Other ideas for success include:

- Creating a color-coded system or chart for organizational purposes
- Setting specific start and stop limits for completion
- Using an alarm or timer
- Implementing a student learning log for each group

Characteristics of Structuring Effective Learning Groups

There are common characteristics found in all types of effective learning groups. The work is challenging and meaningful as the teacher is actively involved in the students' learning process, serving as a resource, questioner, guide, evaluator, and coach. The learning goals and timelines are clearly understood by the students and monitored by the teacher. Groups, unless formed as performance-based, are heterogeneous with active involvement by all students. Cooperation within the group is valued over competition, and all students have a sense of being able to accomplish more learning together than they would alone.



When setting up learning groups, consider the following:

- Assign specific roles to assist in building conversation within groups.
- Begin with a question that allows for divergent thinking.
- Determine group size based on manageability and learning purpose.
- To ensure accountability, alternate between individual and group work throughout the process.
- Collaboration is key. Students build off of each other's ideas and insights.
- Ensure high engagement with a continuous flow so that instruction is one uninterrupted sequence.

For additional information, resources, and examples, visit:

<http://hob-flexiblegrouping.wikispaces.com/>

For further information on this topic, contact:

Pam Sudduth

-or-

Shelby Robertson

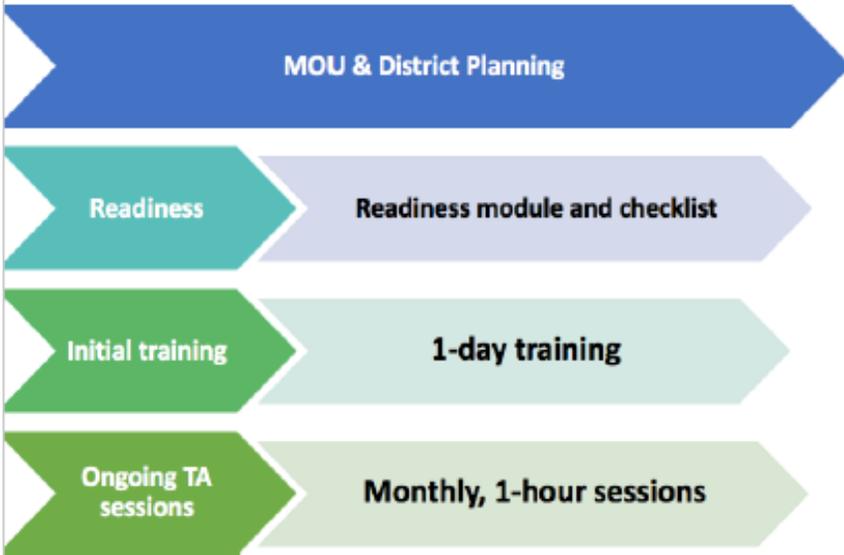
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Coaching Classroom PBIS

Devon Minch, Technical Assistance Specialist, PBIS



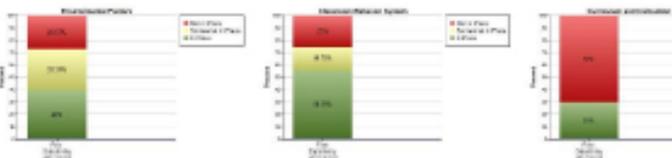
The FLPBIS Project works with the district leadership team to develop plans that result in district coaching capacity to support classroom teachers. A district plan outlines support needed at every level including logistics and support for an initial 1-day training and monthly technical assistance sessions.

A Collaborative Data-Driven Process

The FLPBIS Project works with the district leaders to support coaches who in turn support classroom teachers. Coaches learn to utilize effective communication and interpersonal skills in the context of a data-based problem solving process to collaborate with and support classroom teachers.

UTILIZE STUDENT BEHAVIOR DATA TO DEFINE CLASSWIDE CONCERNS <i>Identify and assess current levels of classroom behavior</i>	SELF-ASSESS AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT <i>Utilize the CAT to determine strengths and areas of classroom practices that can be targeted for improvement</i>
IMPLEMENT PRACTICES & STRATEGIES ALIGNED WITH CLASSROOM NEEDS	UTILIZE STUDENT BEHAVIOR DATA TO INFORM ONGOING CHANGES <i>Ineffective strategies are discontinued. Barriers to success are problem-solved</i>

The Classroom Assistance Tool (CAT)



The CAT is a free, web-based self-assessment or observation coaching tool to improve classroom practices. Try it here now!

Classroom PBIS

PBIS practices, when implemented in the classroom setting, significantly contribute to positive student outcomes. **Click through the text boxes and images below** to access resources related to the 5 essential elements that make up comprehensive classroom supports:

Be sure to click on headings and tiles for links to additional information.

<p>Maximize Structure & Create Effective Environments</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy traffic flow • Adequate supervision • Clearly marked areas • Effective layout & seating arrangements • Minimize crowding & distractions • Predictable routines & procedures
<p>Actively Engage Students</p>		<p>Provide high rates of opportunities to respond</p> <p>Response cards, guided notes, class-wide peer tutoring, computer assisted instruction, direct instruction</p> <p>Link engagement with objectives</p>
<p>Teach, monitor and reinforce expectations and rules</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-5, positively stated • Rules operationally define SW expectations for each classroom • Explicitly & consistently modeled, taught and reinforced
<p>Acknowledge appropriate behavior</p>		<p>Specific and contingent upon appropriate behavior</p> <p>4:1 positive to negative</p> <p>Continuum of strategies for reinforcement</p> <p>Group contingencies</p> <p>Token economies</p>
<p>Responses to problem behavior</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutral, brief error corrections • Responses reduce problem behavior, not escalate it • Planned ignoring • Time out from reinforcement

For more information on this topic, contact:

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Leveraging the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM)[™] in

Creating Optimal Learning Environments

~Janice Creneti, Project Coordinator, FL's SPDG SIM Project

As educators, we seek to empower our students to become highly skilled life-long learners and problem solvers. We are also tasked with moving our students towards proficiency of newer, more cognitively demanding standards. An essential shift in achieving these goals is the move to student-centered learning environments. "Research shows that this is the type of setting necessary for students to develop the skills to succeed in college, career and life... Creating student-centered learning environments is one way the country can effectively address the opportunity gap for (low income) students (McKenna, 2014). However, teachers and students struggle in this transition due to a foundational aspect of the student-centered classroom—the need for student collaboration. In order for students to master complex content, they must grapple with what they are learning, and this often takes the form of discussing and applying their thinking with peers. Many students lack the confidence and/or skill for this type of engagement. After decades of students being told to "be quiet," they are often startled when now asked to "turn and talk." Additionally, they are being asked to engage in higher order thinking rather than providing simple answers sufficient for lower level learning tasks. In fact, students who are used to a more traditional teacher-centered environment may even experience aspects of trauma and grief when forced to take the lead in their own learning (Woods in Felder & Brent, 1996).

How then can we provide students with the instructional scaffolding and the differentiated support they need to engage in the collaboration and cognitive rigor required for success in a student-centered learning environment? How can we support students in strengthening the social skills needed to engage confidently and appropriately with peers? How can we cultivate the classroom culture and routines that set the tone for student ownership of learning and build career and academic success behaviors? One answer is the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) developed by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

SIM is a comprehensive program of research-validated strategies (Learning Strategies) and instructional routines (Content Enhancement Routines) designed to make learning accessible and appropriately challenging for all secondary learners. Learning Strategies address a variety of academic and interaction skills students need to engage in demanding learning situations such as paraphrasing a reading passage (Paraphrasing Strategy), reflecting on what was read (Self-Questioning Strategy), participating in collaborative activities (Talking Together), and accepting criticism (Socially Wise Program). Content Enhancement Routines (CERs) support teachers in designing highly effective instruction that allows course content to be accessed by all students. Planning Routines (Course Organizer Routine, Unit Organizer Routine) help teachers identify and thus focus learning on critical content, including the hierarchy of and relationships between the different pieces of content. Teaching Routines (Concept Mastery Routine, Concept Comparison Routine, Framing Routine) foster collaborative learning experiences that build general academic skill while also deepening understanding of and proficiency with course standards. Through co-construction (partnership learning), a driving principle of Content Enhancement Routines, teachers and students make sense of ideas, concepts, and processes together and then students apply what they know in collaborative learning tasks. Co-constructed CER devices provide students with the language they need to talk effectively about content.

The greatest impact on student proficiency and confidence is seen when teachers use multiple routines and use each of them regularly. To this end, the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) SIM Project piloted a new approach to professional learning with high school math and science teachers. "Course First!" shifted planning focus to the course level to support creation of coherent units and lessons across a course. It also

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Leveraging the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM)[™] in Creating Optimal Learning Environments

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emphasized the use of the explicit instructional sequence —“Cue-Do-Review”— across all classroom activities, rather than just for use with Content Enhancement Routines. During professional learning sessions, teachers uncovered topics in their content areas that are challenging for students and determined the type of thinking that their students are required to do. Then, SIM professional developers helped teachers choose, learn, and create a draft device for a routine that matched the support students need to think about the topic. The teachers integrated the routines into their instructional plans as they learned them, shifting silos of implementation to articulated units and lessons. This “routine use” of routines helped build a learning environment where high expectations for all students were matched with the high level of scaffolding and support that was needed. Course First! pilot teachers provided favorable reviews and feedback that reflected their use of a wider variety of routines and increased participation in coaching support. Teachers from this year-long pilot had the following to say about the impact of routine use in their classrooms:

“The Unit Organizers and FRAMES help to keep my students focused during class... They know where and how to find information when they need it...” – B. LeClerc

“It is something that they (students) actually ask for... I have also noticed that I have some of the highest engagement levels during the routines.” – J. Shipe

“For the student, the routines provide a structured way to take notes, review content, develop vocabulary and reading skills, organize chunks of information, and know exactly what is important to understand about the unit of study... My test results are much better, with averages at least one letter grade higher than in previous years.” - P. Lussy

“The routine use of CE has allowed my students to have a sense of comfort when faced with new material. They are more willing to accept challenging topics because they are presented in a manner that they (the students) are very familiar and comfortable with.” – S. Strickland

“I have found that by using CERs ...student engagement has increased substantially...I have also seen scores improve on assessments and greater confidence on work being attempted. My referral numbers this year are the lowest they have ever been... and none for classroom management... all my students have been working as instructed and expected.” – T. Trealout

SIM is a tremendous program with routines and strategies that touch every aspect of supporting students in becoming highly skilled life-long learners who are college and career ready as well as supporting teachers in fostering optimal, student-centered learning environments.

For SIM PD opportunities in Florida, visit <http://www.fdlrs.org/sim-events/eventsbyyear/2017/- .html>.

For more information on SIM, visit <http://sim.kucrl.org/>.

For information on student impact in Florida, see <http://www.fdlrs.org/statewidepd/florida-s-state-personnel-development-grant.html>.

For more information on this topic, contact:

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Peers as Partners in Learning

~MJ Ziemba, Facilitator, Florida Inclusion Network-North Region

Picture if you will, a typical Director of Exceptional Student Education standing on a street corner on a beautiful Florida spring day. A shady character in a trench coat and fedora approaches and whispers, "Psst! Hey, I know who you are, and I have just what you need."

Eyes wide with surprise, the ESE Director hesitates and then replies, "Oh? What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about graduation rates and students with disabilities," the stranger explains. "Worried about that, aren't you?"

"Well, yes," concedes the Director. "Of course I am. While we are slowly improving, it still causes concern for our district."

"What if I told you that there is a strategy that will provide needed support, on a one-to-one basis, if needed? It's cost effective, as well as research-based," said the stranger, earnestly.

"You've peaked my interest, so tell me more," the Director requested.

The stranger complied...

Starting in January 2016, the State of Florida's Department of Education included in their Course Code Directory and CPALMS an elective course entitled *Peers as Partners in Learning (1400340)*. This course is designed to provide students with disabilities both academic and social support by their nondisabled peers. (Important note: Interestingly, some peers with IEPs have very successfully provided peer support.)

While the course is relatively new, a few schools in Florida have featured peer support for years using several different course codes (for example, *Peer Counseling*), none of which were an exact fit. Based on that success, this course was finalized to meet the specifics of these projects.

There are highly successful peer programs in schools around the state in districts of differing sizes and locales. While there are some differences, there are also some striking similarities.

We suggest a team approach to leadership, development, and initial implementation of such a program. The team, including administrators and teachers, should take sufficient time to structure the program for success. Decisions need to be made regarding student recruitment and eligibility criteria (grade point average, attendance, discipline referral standards, for example). Training opportunities and incentives should be finalized. Teachers need to be informed regarding nomination of students with disabilities, for assistance, and guidance to use peers effectively for in-class support. Typically, teams have met monthly, for a semester, to negotiate these decisions.

Since matching peer teams and scheduling them to partner can be complex, all of this must be accomplished well before a project commences at the beginning of a semester.

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Peers as Partners in Learning

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Students enrolled in *Peers as Partners in Learning (PPL)* will complete initial training and, thereafter, attend class with the student to whom they are assigned. Peers can assist in note taking, organizing, reviewing, and other supports according to individual student needs. Supported students are sometimes reluctant to participate but appreciate the opportunity to do so over time.

On larger campuses, where there are more students involved, some programs have one teacher assigned to teach this course who may teach it several times or even every class period. In that model, peers may meet with the course teacher on a regular basis to increase their skills and hone their craft. On other campuses, the numbers of students and ESE teachers may be more limited. In that situation, the teacher may be assigned to *PPL* for one class period and may only be able to provide initial training with more intermittent ongoing instruction. In these models and other variations, teachers consistently retain responsibility for initial training, ongoing monitoring of student participation, grading of assignments, and determining report card grades. Both models have been effective. Timber Creek High School in Orange County credits their *PPL*, the Pit Crew, as a major factor in their graduation rate of 98.4% for all students and 99% for students with disabilities.

Here are some comments from the field:

Student - "I like working with my Gatoraide because she helps me when I don't understand. If I still don't get it, she finds another way to help me and gives me examples to use."

Teacher - "The Gatoraide works with two students who have special needs in the class. She has been a godsend for me because of the varying ability levels of students in the class. She has very good rapport with them and they feel like she is another teacher there just for them. The Gator Aide even makes up games to reinforce skills that are taught."

Pilot program facilitator for Peer Inclusion Team - "Peer Supports at Winter Park High School changed the lives of not only the students with disabilities but those peers who were providing the support. The program increased our school SWD graduation rate, decreased poor attendance, and provided a positive impact out in the community in strengthening an inclusive environment."

Clearly, peer provided academic and social support provides reciprocal benefits for both sets of students. Students with disabilities pass courses they could not have managed on their own. Their peers learn patience, respect for those with challenges, task analysis, employability skills, and often a deeper grasp of academic content. Relationships, and often friendships, develop.

If your school is interested in learning more about developing a *Peers as Partners in Learning Course*, please contact your local FIN facilitator at a nearby FDLRS Center. They would work closely with your team to build a sustainable program. Many students' lives could be changed!

For more information on this topic, contact:

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RESOURCES



The UDL Graphic Organizer – An overview of the UDL Principles.

http://www.udlcenter.org/sites/udlcenter.org/files/updateguidelines2_0.pdf

The UDL Wheel – An interactive online tool with suggestions for designing flexible lessons.

<http://udlwheel.mdonlinegrants.org/>

UDL Look-Fors – Indicators of UDL implementation in a lesson; useful when doing classroom walkthroughs.

Early Stages - <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/hiat-tech/udl/UDLLookForsCaptureSheet.docx>

Later Stages - <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/departments/hiat-tech/udl/UDLLookForsCaptureSheet%20-%20Expert%20Learners.docx>

UDL Guidelines – Examples and Resources

<http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation/examples>

Instructional Materials Learning Supports Rating Scale – A rubric of indicators on learning supports in instructional materials and lessons.

<http://www.tlc-mtss.com/assets/rating-table-resources-survey.pdf>

Video: UDL at a Glance - <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl>

References

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